

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**Sioux Falls School District  
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2001-2002**

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**Dates of On Site Visit:** April 8-11, 2002

**Date of Report:** May 22, 2002

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This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by the Office of Special Education. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

<b>Promising Practice</b>	The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
<b>Maintenance</b>	The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.
<b>Out of Compliance</b>	The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.
<b>Not applicable</b>	In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

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<b>Principle 1 – General Supervision</b>
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General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

**Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

**Data Sources Used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Assessment data
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Child count
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides
- ✍ District policies

- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Letter from district on count verification
- ✍ Meeting minutes with private school leadership
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ State reports
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training log

### **Promising Practices**

The steering committee identified the following areas as promising practices. The district operates a year-round screening and evaluation program for students younger than six years of age. Screening information is provided to parents of all students in the Sioux Falls Public Schools, doctors' offices, day care centers, and social service agencies. Screeners will make site visits to day care centers that have 5 or more students to be screened. A Head Start coordinator works with the screening office to prepare Head Start applications for children who meet the Head Start guidelines. Children who do not meet recommended screening scores are referred for evaluation by a team trained to do early childhood assessments.

The district collects standardized entry and exit scores, as well as curriculum-based measures at the beginning and end of the school year for those students at the early childhood level. Student growth is computed by classroom, building, and district with the results used by buildings to develop improvement plans.

The district collects data regarding attendance, grades, suspensions, and discipline referrals each quarter. Data is collected before placement, during placement, and after placement. Results are used to determine effectiveness of programs and to plan improvements.

Alternate assessment pre and post-test data are collected for all subject areas and growth is analyzed by student, by grade, by building, and by district. Results are then shared with buildings to assist them in improving results.

### **Maintenance**

The steering committee concluded that the district's child find system, with the exception of early childhood, includes all children, including those enrolled in private schools. The special education director consults with private school administrators annually to assure that all activities are carried out, commensurate with public school activities.

The special education director analyzes expenditures annually to assure that designated funds are spent on those children voluntarily enrolled in private schools and shares this information at a meeting with private school administrators. December 1 child count data is collected by service providers and sent to private school administrators for verification. Private school administrators make recommendations as to allocation of funds.

Private school representatives, district representatives, and parents attend meetings for students placed by the school district. Services and rights are the same for in-district and out-of-district students. All services are provided at no cost and in the least restrictive environment.

The district collects data concerning the use of suspension, expulsion, and alternate educational settings for children with disabilities. The data is collected by race, ethnicity, and disability, and is accurately reported to the Office of Special Education. The district offers extensive training and procedures for managing behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, and alternative education settings.

## **Needs Improvement**

The district offers an extensive array of pre-referral programs, including academic, behavior, second language, and student assistance team programs. There are identified processes for receiving referrals from staff, parents, agencies, and private schools. All referrals are documented on the parent notice form, which is accompanied by a statement of parent rights and by either a request for consent for evaluation or an invitation to a meeting to explain why the district does not recommend evaluation. Nevertheless, 5% of files were reported as missing referral forms. Follow-up is needed to determine whether referral information was missing from the consent form or whether the students were already identified when they came to the district. Staff interviews indicated that there is confusion in some buildings as to how to handle speech-only referrals, which do not go through the student assistance team process. Clarification to staff is needed on speech-only referrals.

The district hires individuals who are appropriately and adequately trained for greater than 96% of positions. Staff who are not adequately trained are required to obtain certification within 2 years. The district offers exemplary supervision and training programs for all staff. A training plan is developed annually, based on a needs assessment circulated to all special education staff, all administrators, and a sample of regular educators. Parents were added to that survey this year. In addition, the parent advisory committee designs a fall training meeting, to which all parents are invited. Nevertheless, 35% of staff say that they do not have input into the identification of staff development needs. The steering committee concluded that the district needs to give better feedback to staff as to how their input is used.

## **Out of Compliance**

The district includes all children in the district, state, or alternate assessments. Results are reported to the state and provided to teachers and administrators for use in improving results. State and district standards are included in the computer IEP system for convenient use in developing IEPs. Students with disabilities have higher graduation rates than their non-disabled peers. Nevertheless, the district does not collect adequate information for assessment of progress for students who take the SAT 9. Because the majority of these students require non-standard accommodations, the district does not have a way to use the data to develop progress reports by grade level, building, or district. The district needs to find a way to use raw scores or identify another systematic method for assessing student growth for this population.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising Practices**

During interviews with the early childhood special education staff, it became clear that curriculum-based measurement is utilized to improve the results of students with disabilities at the early childhood level and was therefore validated as a promising practice by the monitoring team. Results of the ongoing assessments are compiled by the early childhood special education teacher and shared with the building administrator and the early childhood director. The results of student growth are then used by buildings to develop plans, which will help to improve the education of early childhood students throughout the district.

Through documentation review and interview, the monitoring team was able to validate that analysis of alternate assessment pre and post-test data is a promising practice for the district. The database tool developed by the district as well as the way the district utilizes the information appears to the monitoring team to be an innovative method for improving student and district results.

Based on observation and interview, the monitoring team validates that the district staff going into the day care centers for the screening of children, if five or more children are identified to be screened, could be a promising practice.

The monitoring team validated the behavior documentation by the district is a promising practice. The district documentation reviewed showed behavior plans developed, functional behavioral assessment, behavior data and

manifestation determinations for each time a student was suspended. The documentation was thorough and well developed to address the student issues.

## **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

During the self-assessment process, the steering committee concluded that the district does not collect adequate information concerning the assessment of progress for students with disabilities who participate the SAT 9 assessment. It was determined that the majority of these students participating in the assessment are doing so with the use of nonstandard accommodations, therefore, no percentages are made available to assess student growth. Although the steering committee found this to be an area of noncompliance for the district, the monitoring team was unable to validate this while onsite. Through documentation and interview, it was determined that students with disabilities participate in state and district-wide assessments to the maximum extent appropriate, which is the requirement. Should the district wish to address the issue of assessing student growth on the SAT 9 assessment for students who participate with nonstandard accommodations, the monitoring team encourages them to do so.

## **Needs Improvement**

The steering committee indicated that teaching staff feel as though their input concerning staff development and training needs are not taken into consideration and is an area that needs improvement. Through interview with the district staff, the monitoring team concluded that staff development needs are consistently being met and were unable to validate a training need. However, should the district wish to address concern, the monitoring team encourages them to do so.

## **Out of Compliance**

ARSD 24:05:24:01 Referral

While completing the self-assessment process, the steering committee had determined that 5% of the files reviewed by the district were missing written referral documentation and that this was an issue that needed improvement. During the onsite visit, the monitoring team found 11 additional files where the written referral was missing and determined this to be an area out of compliance for the school district. Administrative rule states a referral may be submitted verbally by a parent, however, this must be documented by the school district. Based upon information received at Jefferson Elementary School, students are (first) referred to the Student Assistance Team (SAT) if the teacher is having a problem in the classroom. The SAT addresses the identified issues and suggests strategies to implement in the classroom. If the strategies are ineffective, the SAT may suggest a referral for special education. This referral may be a statement written on the SAT meeting notes. Once this decision is made, a ¼ sheet document is completed with copies going to the special education teacher, regular classroom teacher and principal. This sheet tracks the dates the district sends the list of evaluation/consent to the family and the date they are returned. The SAT does keep track of when the consent is received. The SAT also documents when the parent was contacted initially and by whom. Through interview, district staff stated they do not complete an informal review process. If a parent makes a referral, the child is automatically evaluated. The ¼ sheet “initial referral form” is used to begin the process. A statement is made on the consent for evaluation document regarding the reason for the request. It usually stated, “parent requested evaluation.”

## **Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education**

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

## **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

### **Data sources used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Assessment data
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Complaints and Hearings
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides
- ✍ District policies
- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training logs

### **Promising Practices**

The Sioux Falls Public Schools offers a full continuum of programs for students with behavioral challenges, including those students who have been suspended for 10 or more cumulative days. The district has developed procedures to assist students with challenging behaviors at all levels. If the procedures don't result in the desired behavioral changes, additional assistance is available at each level. For those students in early childhood special education programs, a behavior specialist is available to assist in developing and implementing alternative strategies. Elementary students may be eligible for an alternate program known as Bridges and currently housed at Jefferson Elementary or for an out of district program such as Children's Home Society.

An extensive 1999 study of middle school and high school students with behavioral challenges resulted in the development of a four-tiered behavior programming model. In this model, Tier 1 begins with building based support in the general curriculum and moves to Tier 4, which is a center based structure/consequence model. Over the course of the current school year, the district has revised its behavior intervention manual through the use of an outside consultant. This resource is available to all district staff for use in conducting functional behavioral analysis and developing behavior intervention plans for students.

The Sioux Falls Public Schools has developed procedures and forms for completing the manifestation determination and using alternate education settings. Students who are suspended from an elementary school may have their special education needs met at the elementary out of school suspension site, which is currently at Horace Mann Elementary. Secondary students may attend Joe Foss Middle/High School out of school suspension alternative program.

In addition to offering alternative sites, the Sioux Falls Public Schools has also undertaken an extensive training program for staff to assist them in working with students with behavioral challenges. During the 2001-02 school year, the district contracted with two consultants to complete three hours of training for all elementary and secondary resource and cluster staff on the writing and implementing of behavior improvement plans. Direct, small group follow-up allowed all staff to work with one of the consultants on the development of a behavior plan for an actual student. This summer, two 2-day workshops featuring nationally known speakers will be offered to staff on behavior management.

### **Maintenance**

Procedures relative to Free Appropriate Public Education are implemented, including services to all identified children at no charge across preschool (from age 3), elementary and secondary levels in placements across the continuum prescribed by IDEA. Individual education plans are developed to reasonably achieve educational benefits for children. Adequate staff are available to provide FAPE to identified students. This includes special

education teachers and related services staff, along with a variety of specialists in the areas of behavior, autism, and assistive technology.

The Sioux Falls Public Schools has adopted a standard set of discipline rules and behavior expectations for all students. Student discipline incidents are tracked through the district student management system (TSIS). The district has written and implements procedures relative to the development of behavior intervention plans and disability manifestation determination. Procedures relative to suspension/expulsion are implemented appropriately based upon a series of file reviews.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising Practices**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as promising practices for free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee.

### **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with the identified areas of maintenance, the implementation of FAPE and the district-wide discipline rules and behavior expectations with the TSIS tracking system, for free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee.

## **Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation**

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

## **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

### **Data sources used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Assessment data
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Complaints and Hearings
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides
- ✍ District policies
- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training logs

## **Promising Practices**

The steering committee concluded that the district's consent for reevaluation form and multidisciplinary evaluation team report forms are very clear and document participants, timelines, and decision making rationale. They also determined that initial referral logs document and assist with tracking timelines.

The district has created the positions of evaluation team leaders and department chairpersons who are allocated extra pay to serve as resources to building teachers in the evaluation and IEP process. They attend all training sessions and disseminate information to their departments in their individual school buildings. They assist with maintaining evaluation and IEP timelines, scheduling, training educational assistants and new teachers, and coordinating curriculum planning and transition. The district has also developed specialized teams to assist with eligibility determination (Autism Team, Assistive Technology Team, and Traumatic Brain Injury Team).

The steering committee determined the Special Education Mentor Teacher Program to be a promising practice for the Sioux Falls Public Schools. Veteran teachers are trained to mentor and they assist a new teacher with the first two to three evaluations, Individual Educational Plans, help with preparations for instruction and answer routine questions about special education procedures.

The steering committee concluded that 99% of the file review samples indicated that all evaluations on the prior notice/consent were administered as well as 100% of the file review samples contained parental consent prior to the evaluation. They also determined the district is exemplary in providing translators (from the district's English as a Second Language Program, the district's Immersion Center or Lutheran Social Services) and that the district provides sign language interpreters as needed. It was also determined that multicultural resources help provide assessments in native languages.

## **Maintenance**

The steering committee concluded that district policies and procedures support implementation for reevaluation and continuing eligibility and that parents are given copies of the evaluation reports. It was also determined that children are not identified as being a child with a disability if the reason for such a decision is lack of instruction in reading or math, or limited English proficiency. Sioux Falls Public Schools serves many students whose primary language is not English. Regular education programs for these students include the Family Immersion Center (a self-contained program), Center Based Programs (pull out programs), and Itinerant programs (classroom modifications and consultation), depending on the student's needs.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising Practices**

While onsite, the monitoring team was able to validate evaluation team leaders, department chairpersons, and testing teams to be promising practices for the district. During interview, the special education staff indicated the positions of evaluation team leaders and department chairpersons and their assistance helped to alleviate the burden of paperwork and time-consuming tasks concerning evaluations and IEPs. Those individuals also serve as resources to the teachers and assist them with training and staff development. Testing teams complete assessments pertaining to specific disabilities and assist with the eligibility determination. The availability of these individuals as resources allows for more planning time and actual teaching time with the students.

### **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for appropriate evaluation as concluded by the steering committee. While the steering committee concluded that forms, translators/interpreters, consent and evaluation to all be promising practices for the district, administrative rules of South Dakota requires these to be completed. Therefore, the monitoring team was unable to validate these to be innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices; however, they were able to validate these requirements to be at a maintenance level for the district.

## **Needs Improvement**

The administrative rules of South Dakota state the district must ensure that the evaluations are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by the test producers. It was unclear to the reviewers whether the school nurse was qualified to administer the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Assessment. The monitoring team reviewed 16 files which documented that either the nurse or the nurse and another person signed the evaluation report. The qualifications of the other person signing were unclear. Some files reviewed clearly indicated the nurse administering the assessments had a Masters degree as required by testing protocols.

In the case of a student whose behavior impedes his/her learning or that of others, the IEP team must consider if appropriate strategies including positive behavioral interventions, strategies and supports are needed to address that behavior. During student file reviews by the monitoring team, 5 students were found to have behavior concerns noted by the parents and teachers, but "behavior impedes learning" was checked "no" on each student's IEP. Ex: An autistic student's classroom observation stated the following, "Student was frustrated, preoccupied with balancing a pencil on fingertip. Difficulty maintaining attention to task (filling out assignment notebook completing transitions). Observed occasionally staring off into space. Adaptation to change is very difficult for this student. He shows severe reaction to change (hit, kick, running away)". Another student's file showed parental concern for behaviors and a classroom observation shows difficulty getting along with others and focusing. Attention to task affected ability to get work done. The monitoring team encourages the district to review information in policy pertaining to consideration of special factors.

During the onsite review, the monitoring team discovered a file in which the student moved into the Sioux Falls Public Schools from the state of Iowa on March 22, 2002. Each state has designated its own criteria for special education eligibility and in Iowa, the student had been identified as an "Eligible Individual". An IEP team meeting was held on March 28, 2002 to determine if the student would qualify as a student with a disability according to South Dakota eligibility criteria. During the March 28, 2002 meeting, the IEP team determined this student to be eligible under the mental retardation criteria; however, there was no adaptive behavior evaluation included in the file to support the category indicated.

## **Out of Compliance:**

### **ARSD 24:05:25:04.02 Determination of needed evaluation data**

It is required that at least every three years a student is reevaluated to determine continuing eligibility. It is the responsibility of the IEP team to review existing evaluation data and determine if any other data are needed to make decisions about a student's eligibility and services. If the IEP team determines that no additional data are needed, the district is to inform the parents that no additional data are needed, the reasons for it, and the parent's right to still request an evaluation. In interview with district staff and special education administration, they stated the school district does not encourage comprehensive three-year reevaluations once students reach high school. The middle and high school staff indicated that typically the last comprehensive three-year reevaluation was completed at the middle school level. Once the student reached high school, the ability and achievement evaluation results were used from the previous three-year re-evaluation and minimal assessments were necessary at this time. In 17 of the files reviewed, the prior notice for reevaluation did not indicate that previous data was being brought forward and the reasons for it, therefore, the monitoring team determined this to be an area out of compliance for the district.

### **ARSD 24:05:25:04 Evaluation procedures**

Through staff interviews and file reviews, the monitoring team found the majority of the special education staff to be unfamiliar with the functional assessment requirement. District staff did not include functional information in the evaluation process or understand that this information was to be used for determining specific skill areas affected by the student's disability, the student's present levels of performance, their progress in the general curriculum or development of annual goals and short term instructional objectives. Functional assessment data are critical since the practical information provided is necessary for developing well written individually tailored IEPs. Functional data sources are systematic observations, grade level textbook placement tests, curriculum-based assessments, informal reading inventories and numerous criterion-referenced measures. Functional assessment information is available through a variety of sources in the district, however, there is not an established process for collecting,



analyzing, summarizing or integrating the information into the 25 day evaluation process or the development of the student's IEP. Through documentation review, it was found that 94 files were missing evidence of functional assessment in the evaluation and IEP development processes, therefore the monitoring team determined this to be an area out of compliance for the district.

24:05:27:13.02 Transition services

Transition services are to be a coordinated set of activities, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities. These activities must be based on the individual student's needs and takes into account the student's preferences and interests. Through documentation review, the monitoring team found 16 files where a transition evaluation was not considered or administered in order to design an outcome-oriented process based on the student's needs, preferences and interests. The only instances where the monitoring team saw evidence of good transition planning and evaluation, was for those students with more severe and profound disabilities. Based on the documentation found, the monitoring team determined this to be an area out of compliance for the district.

## **Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards**

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

#### **Data sources used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Complaints and Hearings
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides
- ✍ District policies
- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training logs

#### **Promising Practices**

The steering committee concluded that English and Spanish rights are available and that the district is exemplary in providing translators (from the district's English as a Second Language Program, the district's Immersion Center or Lutheran Social Services). The district also provides sign language interpreters as needed.

#### **Maintenance**

The steering committee concluded that district policies and procedures support implementation of confidentiality, access to records and an independent educational evaluation. It was determined that the district's adult student transfer of rights form includes the regulations, the signature of the student, the date and that timelines for transfer of

rights are maintained. The content of rights form contains the required content and parent consent and the prior notice is consistently documented.

Other areas of maintenance, as concluded by the steering committee, include procedures for complaints and due process hearings and that they are followed in a timely manner. Follow-up training is conducted for all staff, and revisions to forms and procedures are made to the district's handbook and the computer IEP program as needed.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising practices**

The Sioux Falls school district works in cooperation with the district's Immersion Center and with Lutheran Social Services to provide translators for students and families. The monitoring team validated this as a promising practice due to the community involvement and the utilizing of community resources to enhance the students and family's participation in the educational process.

### **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for procedural safeguards as concluded by the steering committee with a cautionary note concerning adult transfer of rights. It is required that at least one year prior to the student's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday; the district must provide notice to the student and the parents about the upcoming transfer of parent rights. The monitoring team found six files where the notice of transfer of rights was not within the one-year timeline.

Although the Sioux Falls steering committee determined the availability of English and Spanish rights and the provision of sign language interpreters to be promising practices, administrative rules require that these procedural safeguards be in place for any student and family from birth to 21. The monitoring team determined that procedural safeguards and sign language interpreters are available for all students and families in the Sioux Falls Public Schools, and did validate these to be at a maintenance level for the district.

### **Needs Improvement**

If the purpose of an IEP meeting is the consideration of transition services for a student ages 14 to 21 or younger, if appropriate, the agency must invite the student. The IEP is to be driven by the student's desired life planning outcomes of employment and living. The monitoring team found 4 student files where a student with a disability age 14 –16 was not invited to the meeting where transition was to be discussed.

## **Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

#### **Data sources used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Assessment data
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Complaints and Hearings
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides

- ✍ District policies
- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training logs

## **Promising Practices**

The Sioux Falls Public Schools has expended special education funds to develop a comprehensive evaluation and IEP software package which is linked directly to the district's student data system. This reduces the need to enter student identification information on multiple occasions. Through the district's network, teachers and other authorized users can access all of the forms needed for any aspect of a child's special education program (from prior notice and consent to evaluation, IEP, behavior management and other related forms). Once completed, forms can be electronically submitted to the district's central office.

In addition, the district has developed a mid-level position of an IEP facilitator, who is responsible for arranging IEP and related meetings as well as preparing the necessary paperwork under the direction of the special education teacher. Special education teachers at all levels have access to these staff, primarily within their own school building.

## **Maintenance**

The steering committee concluded that all IEP procedures are implemented appropriately including invitations and notices, team membership, timelines, and content. Parents are informed of the child's progress toward the annual goals at least as often as other parents are informed of student progress. Transition procedures are implemented in conjunction with the IEP and teachers are given additional direction on transition through the district's special education handbook.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising Practices**

The monitoring team was able to validate that the comprehensive evaluation and IEP software package as well as the mid-level position of IEP facilitator to be promising practices for the district. The software package helps to reduce the inevitability of duplication and allows all authorized users easy access to the student's information and forms needed. During interviews, the special education staff indicated the IEP facilitators were extremely useful concerning the reduction of paperwork and organization. Again, both of these resources allow the teachers more planning and teaching time with the students.

The district is also in the process of utilizing the Parent View Program, which is a computerized system to maintain individualized student data on the Internet. Information contained within the student's profile includes daily class assignments, test grades, class grades, etc. This information is pass code protected and can be accessed anytime by the student's teachers, the student and the student's parents and the monitoring team validated this program to be a promising practice for the Sioux Falls School District.

### **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for individual education program as concluded by the steering committee.

## **Needs Improvement**

Each student's IEP is to include the anticipated frequency, location and duration of the services and modifications being provided. In six of the files reviewed, the location of the service was omitted from the configuration description (page 5 of the district IEP form). The directions on the IEP form states, "clearly document the amount of time to be committed to each of the various services to be provided. This amount of services must clearly reflect the district's commitment of resources. The district IEP reflects the student's hours of special education services as pullout, co-taught, adaptive physical education, OT, etc," however, the district procedures do not include location information, which is a requirement.

In order to ensure appropriate IEP team membership, a representative of the school district must be present who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction, is knowledgeable about the general curriculum, and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources. The federal interpretation of a school district representative has been explained as "Each public agency may determine which specific staff member will serve as the agency representative in a particular IEP meeting, so long as the individual meets the requirements. It is important, however, that the agency representative have the authority to commit agency resources and be able to ensure that whatever services are set out in the IEP will actually be provided. A public agency may designate another public agency member of the IEP team to also serve as the agency representative, so long as that individual meets the requirements." The monitoring team located 4 files where the administrator was not invited to the meeting and was designated as the school representative. In interview with staff, 14 special education teachers indicated they were the district representative at IEP meetings, but did not believe they have the ability to designate funds. In interview with the special education administration and review of the district's special education policy, the district has developed a very explicit matrix, which specifically addresses the hierarchy for the district representative at IEP meetings. The monitoring team recommends that the district review this policy with all pertinent staff to ensure appropriate team membership at all IEP meetings.

## **Out of Compliance**

### **ARSD 24:05:27:13:02 Outcome Oriented Process**

By age 14, life-planning outcomes, employment and independent living, are to be identified for each student on an IEP. The school district's form (SE-99-IEP-1b) states that this is required by age 16, but since the transition course of study is based on these outcomes, the life-planning outcomes should be included by age 14. Ten of the files reviewed did not include life-planning outcomes for the district's 14 and 15-year-old students. In interview with staff, they indicated life-planning outcomes were not always addressed at IEP meetings for this age of students.

### **ARSD 24:05:27:13.2 Transition Course of Study**

Every student on an IEP, age 14 or older, must have a statement of transition service needs that focuses on the student's course of study. The school district does use a broad, three-category system, which purports to identify a student's course of study: A) Vocational and Functional Skills; B) Coursework toward SFPS district minimum competencies; and C) Advanced Placement. However, a more detailed and more individualized approach to the course of study is required. Specific courses that are tied to each student's life planning outcomes should be discussed by the IEP team and incorporated into the IEP document. The course of study should include all of the classes that the student is projected to take through graduation. The school district does have a form available in its handbook to improve on this requirement; however, this form is not consistently used resulting in the absence of an individualized course of study as located by the monitoring team in file reviews of 19 students.

## **Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment**

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

#### **Data sources used:**

- ✍ Administrator surveys
- ✍ Assessment data
- ✍ Budgeted services
- ✍ Complaints and Hearings
- ✍ Comprehensive plan
- ✍ Curriculum guides
- ✍ District policies
- ✍ Educator surveys
- ✍ File reviews
- ✍ Handbook
- ✍ Parent surveys
- ✍ Personnel hired (state data)
- ✍ Student data
- ✍ Student surveys
- ✍ Teacher schedules
- ✍ Training logs

#### **Promising Practices**

The district has developed exemplary modified and alternate curriculums for use with students. Curriculum studies have resulted in modifications for math, language arts, reading, social studies and early childhood curriculums. In addition to purchasing a commercial alternate curriculum, an extensive guide for teachers has been developed to assist them in providing services for students. Extensive training for resource and cluster teachers has been completed in the language arts, math and early childhood curriculums.

A functional skills curriculum has been developed to meet the needs of those students who cannot participate in the regular curriculum even with modifications. Included in this alternate curriculum is a comprehensive listing of benchmarks, which can be selected for individual students as their IEPs are developed. Student activities along with adapted materials are also part of the materials kits that accompany these curriculums. Numerous object and picture adaptations have been made to assist those students whose understanding or use of language is limited. Specialized commercial software programs are provided in each classroom for students with severe disabilities along with simple technology adaptations for toys and communication.

#### **Maintenance**

The Sioux Falls Public Schools provides students with placement options across the continuum. Students are served in settings other than the regular classroom only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. The district operates a program for preschoolers who are not disabled (Head Start). A project is underway which provides placement for children with and without disabilities within the same classroom. This model was initiated at two sites during the last school year. In addition, special education services are provided on an itinerant basis in school based and community Head Start programs.

One question that emerged during the data collection surrounded the perception of teachers that general education staff do not modify and adapt general education curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities (64.5% say they do), especially at the secondary level. These survey findings contradict the file reviews, which indicate that modifications are spelled out. The procedure exists and appears to be implemented. The district is asking state reviewers to gather any additional information during the onsite review to determine if this is an area that needs improvement.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising Practices**

The monitoring team reviewed a sampling of the modified curriculum guides developed by the school district. The curriculum guides are a resource for all teachers as they provide concrete examples for working in the individual classrooms on district adopted regular curriculum to encourage maximum inclusion of children with disabilities. The guides are in all classes/subjects and at all levels, kindergarten through grades twelve. Local staff, working in the areas of their expertise/certification and to assure the recommendations are workable in the real world, developed the guides. Although the district reported extensive training was done for resource and cluster teachers with the curriculum guides, not all individuals interviewed in the review process were aware of these resources.

The team visited with staff at the cluster classrooms at JFK Elementary and the functional skill curriculum was being used extensively. Two teachers and the integration specialist spoke highly of the applicability of the materials and activities. The reason the local district developed the curriculum was the lack of good quality commercial materials that related to the local community environment, therefore, this has been validated as a promising practice for the district.

Although the steering committee did not identify looping as a promising practice, the review team noted the district is in the process of implementing a multi-year teaching structure at Patrick Henry Middle School. Looping develops a long-term relationship between teacher and child. In this multi-year structure, the special education teacher instructs the sixth graders in need of special education, for example, then follows his/her students in need of special education to seventh grade. The special education teacher continues on with the students to eighth grade, while the eighth grade teacher moves to sixth grade and picks up the new students in the sixth grade in need of special education. The review team considers this an exemplary practice.

Community Campus is a community-based program, offering skill training in the areas of employment and independent living. The program incorporates social skills, goal setting, and development of self-advocacy skills. The monitoring review team identified Community Campus as a promising practice due to the innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices of the program.

### **Maintenance**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as maintenance for least restrictive environment as concluded by the steering committee.